Chief Executives Board for Coordination

26 November 2018

English only

# Report of the High-level Committee on Programmes at its thirty-sixth session

**(Headquarters of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, Rome, 9 and 10 October 2018)**

## I. Introduction

1. The High-level Committee on Programmes of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) held its thirty-sixth session at the headquarters of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), in Rome, on 9 and 10 October 2018. The agenda of the meeting and the list of participants are contained in annexes I and II.

2. In welcoming the Committee, the Vice-President of IFAD, Cornelia Richter, expressed special appreciation for the efforts of the Committee to leverage the transformative power of technological innovation in support of realizing sustainable development for all. She pointed out that for all of the opportunities technologies offered, numerous challenges and open questions concerning their socioeconomic implications remained. Ms. Richter underscored that this demanded frank dialogue from diverse points of view on a wide range of policy issues. In this regard, she considered as essential the Committee's work in pursuing a coordinated system-wide approach that was rights based, people centred and participatory and that paid due regard to ensuring that no one was left behind, including by closing the gap between rural and urban opportunities.

3. In outlining the agenda for the thirty-sixth session, the Chair of the Committee, Guy Ryder, Director General of the International Labour Organization (ILO), recalled that CEB, in deliberating on the impact of disruptive technologies at its first regular session of 2018, had emphasized that technological advancement was interlinked with other global trends, such as growing inequality, demographic changes and governance challenges; a holistic, long-term vision for a future heavily influenced by technologies and other developments was thus needed; the risk of widening inequality across and within countries had to be mitigated and the digital divide closed; and the United Nations system had an important role to play in promoting an inclusive, equitable and human rights-based approach to addressing transformative changes. The Board had further stressed that any strategy aimed at addressing the implications of new technologies had to be focused on investing in people, especially young people, and on supporting developing countries in adapting to the new realities.



Please recycle

4. At its current session, the Committee would advance efforts to pursue whole-system engagement on the implications of frontier technologies in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; promote universal norms and shared values to guide the United Nations system's efforts in an era of transformative change; and, to that end, carry out additional deep-dive analyses to further build system-wide knowledge on and capacity in key "frontier" issues. The Chair further noted that those efforts by the Committee were contributing to the Secretary-General's recently launched strategy on new technologies by helping to strengthen the United Nations system's internal knowledge and capacity. An exploratory discussion on strategic foresight and "futures thinking" would also stimulate the Committee's consideration of new ways of supporting the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, the Committee would contribute a discussion paper in support of the Board's upcoming deliberations on drug policy.

## II. Building system-wide knowledge and capacity through "deep-dive" analyses

### Impact of frontier technologies on developing countries

5. The Chair recalled the guidance of CEB in which it emphasized the need for the United Nations system to ensure that developing countries, especially the least developed and the most vulnerable among them, were not further disadvantaged in an era of rapid and disruptive technological advancement. Further to the decision taken at its thirty-fifth session and on the basis of the analysis contributed by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Committee engaged in an in-depth examination of the impact of new technologies on developing countries as an overarching and cross-cutting "thought input" to its ongoing "frontier issues" workstreams. The purpose was to inject them with the unique perspectives and requirements of developing countries, especially the population in the "bottom billion", as a necessary compass, informing and orienting system-wide approaches being developed under those workstreams.

6. Paul Akiwumi (UNCTAD) presented the analytical paper, underscoring that new technologies: (a) offered unprecedented opportunities to address social, economic and environmental challenges faced by developing countries; (b) opened great opportunities for developing countries to leapfrog — bypassing stages of technology during the development process — and to improve the efficiency of development interventions; (c) could, however, pose serious challenges in terms of jobs, inequality and ethical concerns; and (d) risked widening inequality within and between countries and leaving the poorest and most vulnerable further behind. To seize the opportunities and address the risks, it was essential to support developing countries in pursuing policies that would build digital infrastructure and skills and promote innovation. The paper recommended areas that, from the perspective of developing countries, required greater emphasis in the Committee's ongoing workstreams, as well as issues that could merit deeper examination by the Committee in the future. Finally, the Committee was encouraged to engage more actively in supporting the work of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development as a key forum in which to address the development dimension of science, technology and innovation.

7. In the ensuing discussion, the Committee expressed appreciation for the high quality of the analysis and its strong relevance to the Committee's ongoing work. Members recognized the opportunities for new technologies to offer solutions to challenges faced by the bottom billion, and urged the Committee, in its ongoing work on artificial intelligence capacity-building, to focus on that aspect. Members also strongly supported the recommendation to prioritize innovative solutions to problems

that are the most relevant to developing countries, especially the poorest among them, for example the use of technology to incentivize youth engagement in agriculture. At the same time, members echoed the concern raised in the paper about the serious risk of deepening inequality within and between countries and stressed the need to better understand the linkage between disruptive technologies and inequality, with social justice and protection as the connecting perspective. In this regard, active advocacy by the United Nations system against widening inequality was considered necessary. Risks related to biotechnology and genetic editing were also highlighted as a critical issue in need of closer examination.

8. The Committee supported the need for further reflection on the issue of governance and on how the application of new technologies could be promoted in support of the Sustainable Development Goals at the country level, particularly as a new generation of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks was being pursued. There was a convergence of views on the need to support the capacity for research, development and the sharing of data and to enable developing countries to determine their needs. Some members underscored the importance of the Committee's efforts at the global and policy levels aiming for and resulting in concrete action and impact on the ground. In this regard, members stressed the importance of channelling the Committee's analysis into operational efforts through, inter alia, the sharing of best practices across the system and enhanced engagement with the Commission on Science and Technology for Development and the science, technology and innovation forum to contribute to country-level assessments.

9. In the area of data governance and norms, members voiced ethical and human rights concerns linked to data control and sovereignty. In that regard, they discussed a role that the United Nations system could play to foster local-level capacity development that would enable developing countries to forge appropriate national policies while more effectively participating in global-level rule-setting. Members also discussed the importance of data quality-assurance frameworks to account for such issues as transparency, representativeness and inclusiveness, as well as the need to deepen the analysis around data sovereignty, building on the Board's work on big data in 2015. Furthermore, concern was expressed that the dependence on platforms controlled by a small number of countries and firms would undermine the ability of governments to have full control over data, particularly biodata, resulting in the loosening of protections for their citizens.

10. Bearing in mind the uncertainty over the traditional export-led development pathway, members expressed the view that the United Nations system's approach to globalization, more broadly, needed to be considered. Members called for collective efforts to apply course-correction measures aimed at ending seclusion and reorienting globalization, while also including human mobility in the new equation. A "foresight approach" was mentioned as potentially being a useful in that regard.

11. Harnessing the expertise available in academia and the private sector, as well as traditional knowledge, was underscored as being crucial, and the importance of ensuring a coherent United Nations system approach to the private sector was noted. Furthermore, the need for investing in social innovation, incentivizing the shift of new technologies to more inclusive development and in that regard prioritizing innovative technologies that were focused on such vulnerable groups as children and youth, persons with disabilities, women, refugees and migrants, was also stressed.

**Conclusion**

12. **The Committee supported the analysis and recommendations set out in the paper and requested that they be duly integrated into each ongoing workstream, providing an overarching guiding perspective. The Committee also requested**

**that its secretariat take the discussion into account in planning the Committee's future analytical work.**

# III. Promoting system-wide action on frontier challenges in support of the Sustainable Development Goals

## Artificial intelligence: capacity development for developing countries

13. In introducing the agenda item, the Chair recalled that Committee, in its previous discussions, had recognized the transformative power of artificial intelligence to promote a range of development benefits and serve as a force for good, while also acknowledging its potential to disrupt societies and pose serious ethical and human rights challenges. He further recalled that Committee had agreed to pursue United Nations system-wide engagement, through a three-step approach, to scale up capacity-building support for developing countries to help them harness the potential of artificial intelligence and mitigate its risks in support of sustainable development. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) had been requested to lead a consultative process among Committee members to develop such a system-wide approach.

14. Preetam Maloor (ITU) presented the draft United Nations system-wide strategic approach and road map for supporting capacity development on artificial intelligence for the Committee's consideration, prepared in consultation with interested United Nations agencies, with input from Harvard University's Berkman Klein Centre for Internet and Society. Building on the Committee's earlier guidance, the draft elaborated on the guiding principles on artificial intelligence capacity-building and a framework of key goals and motivations, and proposed a road map for action outlining commitments and measures to support artificial intelligence capacity-building for developing countries in the context of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Mr. Maloor, in particular, sought the Committee's guidance on the appropriate scope and depth of the road map, as well as on the possibility of engaging more systematically with experts and leading thinkers, including in academia, on artificial intelligence, to provide input to Committee's internal process.

15. In the ensuing discussion, the Committee expressed support for the progress made and affirmed its agreement with the shared principles guiding the system-wide effort. With regard to the road map for action, members recalled the intended objective of the initiative, namely, supporting capacity-building in the area of artificial intelligence for developing countries, and urged a more prioritized and bottom-up approach, guided by and respecting the agreed scope. Some of the proposed measures were seen as being too inwardly focused on building internal capacity within the United Nations system, as too technical or as potentially duplicating other ongoing efforts, and were thus considered to be outside of the mandated scope or focus on cross-system coordination and collaboration.

16. The Committee suggested that the road map for action be prioritized and that it be focused more directly on capacity-building for developing countries in the area of artificial intelligence and on such specific needs as bridging the digital divide, infrastructure, artificial intelligence governance and human rights, with a distinct emphasis on reaching the bottom billion. Members also underscored the need for greater synergy between the road map and the Committee's other workstreams (i.e., the future of work and of learning) and the integration of the recommendations reviewed favourably during the earlier discussion through the lens of developing countries. Members also stressed the importance of complementing and not

duplicating other ongoing efforts within the United Nations system, including the Secretary-General's strategy on new technologies, the "AI for Good" series of meetings of United Nations partners organized by ITU and the ITU compendium of activities on artificial intelligence carried out by the United Nations or under intergovernmental processes and platforms.

17. There was strong support for the Committee to pursue dialogue and engage with the outside expertise available in academia, the private sector and civil society as part of its internal coordination process. This workstream, given the nature of the topic, was seen as being especially able to benefit from outside views and expertise prior to the completion of the strategic approach. The Committee noted the importance of focusing such engagement on respect for the principles of due diligence through the lens of human rights.

18. In conclusion, the Chair noted the Committee's agreement with the guiding principles and the overall framework and stressed the need to streamline and prioritize the road map for action on the basis of the Committee's comments. The Chair underscored the importance of ensuring synergy with the other workstreams and integrating the recommendations formulated from the perspective of developing countries, especially, the bottom billion, that had been received positively by the Committee during the previous discussion on another agenda item.

**Conclusion**

19. **The Committee reaffirmed the three-step approach for supporting artificial intelligence capacity-building for developing countries and approved the shared guiding principles and the system-wide framework. It requested ITU, in cooperation with interested agencies and taking into account the comments made, to finalize the road map for system-wide action and to present the full draft of the strategic approach for the Committee's consideration at its thirty-seventh session, bearing in mind the need for prioritization, complementarity and a clearer focus on the bottom billion and ensuring that no one is left behind. The Committee also supported engagement with outside expertise as a valuable input to the internal coordination process.**

## Future of work

20. In introducing the agenda item, the Chair noted that much progress had been made in developing a system-wide strategy on the future of work since the question was first taken up by the Committee, at its thirty-fourth session. Given that the analysis, vision and guiding principles presented in the draft strategy reflected the Committee's previous feedback, the Chair directed the current discussion to concentrate on the key elements of implementation and modalities for action and follow-up.

21. Sangheon Lee (ILO) presented the current draft, soliciting feedback on practical actions to facilitate strong and effective joint work and collaboration across the system within the areas outlined (research and knowledge-sharing; implementation, monitoring and measuring impact; new technologies and innovation within the United Nations system; education and training systems and lifelong learning; policy development and technical assistance; norms and standards; and multi-stakeholder partnerships and initiatives to promote a fairer future of work). He invited members' views on mechanisms to monitor, evaluate and adjust the strategy; achieving a high level of visibility for the strategy; aligning it with related initiatives on artificial intelligence and education for greater coherence and synergies; and using partnerships to maximize the strategy's impact. At the next session of the Committee, the full-

fledged strategy, incorporating the Committee's current round of input and guidance, would be presented for approval in principle, pending the outcome of the June 2019 ILO centenary conference.

22. The Committee was supportive of the proposed implementation and follow-up elements, with many members highlighting workstreams to which their organizations were interested in contributing. It was agreed that the strategy should be ambitious and assert United Nations values and norms as basic rights. Recalling the earlier discussion on the bottom billion, members observed that the initiative had great potential to promote equality within and between countries and ensure that no one is left behind.

23. The Committee was of the view that the strategy would benefit from the incorporation of a stronger social perspective, for example by better addressing the evolution of society, including the changing world of work, the relationship between jobs and human dignity and the repercussions of social exclusion. Health and safety could be expressly targeted, for example by promoting the review of outdated systems for health and safety governance. Members noted that the future world of work required a re-examination of informality. In that vein, the strategy should take a stronger stance with respect to defining acceptable parameters for new forms of work and ensuring adequate social protection rather than treating precarious or unprotected forms of work as inevitable.

24. Given the disruptive yet transformative impacts of technology, the Committee underscored the need for lifelong learning, especially of digital skills. In view of demographic trends, while the strategy's focus on providing life skills and economic opportunities for youth was well appreciated, members called for a stronger emphasis on addressing the needs of ageing workers and providing a more universal approach to social protection for young and old alike. In this context, the Committee reiterated the numerous interlinkages and complementarities between this initiative and the system-wide strategic approach on education and learning for all.

25. Members emphasized the need for the strategy to be actionable and results oriented, with an overarching timeline for operationalization within which individual United Nations entities could plan their contributions. The importance of finding traction and making an impact at the country level was underscored, and suggestions were made to ensure that the initiative would be reflected in United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks and that it would engage the United Nations Sustainable Development Group to support the integrated operationalization of the strategy, provide guidance to United Nations country teams on their contribution to the practical implementation of the strategy and mobilize national-level multi-stakeholder debates and action. Many of the policy issues identified within the strategy were transboundary in nature, and it was therefore stressed that the regional dimension of implementation could be strengthened.

26. With respect to partnerships, the Committee considered it important that the strategy more prominently identify organized labour as a key actor and aim to stimulate partnerships between the labour and health sectors. Broader coalitions — beyond governments, employers and workers — would need to be mobilized in order for the initiative to succeed.

27. With regard to promoting the visibility of the strategy, members suggested that the initiative be linked to broader global policy events that would generate global advocacy impacts, in particular the ILO centenary conference and the 2019 high-level political forum, which was due to review Sustainable Development Goal 8 on decent work.

**Conclusion**

28. **The Committee requested ILO to continue to work with interested agencies to deliver to the Committee a full draft of the system-wide strategy, reflecting its deliberations, at its thirty-seventh session.**

## Future of learning and education

29. The Chair recalled that Committee, while considering the implications of disruptive technologies at its thirty-fifth session, had recognized the critical importance of education and lifelong learning in preparing current and future generations for rapidly changing societies. The Committee had agreed that the United Nations system played an important role in promoting an inclusive and equitable approach to addressing opportunities and risks facing the future of education and learning and that the Committee could contribute by developing a system-wide approach, with a strong focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized and on leaving no one behind.

30. The Committee had before it for review a proposed road map, prepared by an 18-entity task group under the leadership of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The Committee was invited to provide guidance on the suggested focus, approach and next steps towards the development of a system-wide strategic approach, to be presented for its consideration at the thirty-seventh session. Given the close linkages with the Committee's workstreams on artificial intelligence and the future of work, the Committee was encouraged to ensure due coordination and synergy.

31. In presenting the proposed road map, Jo Bourne (UNICEF) and Sobhi Tawil (UNESCO) described the aim of the initiative as providing a holistic system-wide approach to support member States in delivering inclusive, equitable and innovative education and learning for all to prepare their citizens to adapt to future realities and demands. The proposal called for a light-touch approach that prioritized the delivery of a limited number of critical interventions in areas where whole-system engagements and collective actions added value and complemented activities and mechanisms already in place, including the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4, on education and learning. Accordingly, the proposal foresaw five core themes: (a) the synergistic use of innovation and technologies; (b) continuous learning through the life cycle; (c) equity, empowerment and support for learning for the most marginalized; (d) partnerships, coordination and optimization in financing and resource mobilization; and (e) skills acquisition and activation.

32. In the ensuing discussion, the Committee expressed broad support for the proposed road map, conveying its appreciation in particular for a strategically prioritized light-touch approach that complemented existing frameworks and mechanisms. Noting the strong relevance of education and learning for a range of development outcomes, the Committee highlighted the importance of an integrated and intersectoral approach, anchored in the 2030 Agenda. In this context, members highlighted the linkage between education, health and women's empowerment. The centrality of education for the girl child, including comprehensive sexual health education, was also noted. Members observed that a growing trend towards the privatization of education posed a particular challenge to the fulfilment of the right to education and the responsibility of the State to meet its obligations. Access to lifelong learning, including e-learning, was considered a useful tool for overcoming the rural-urban divide and contributing to the sustainable rural development of marginalized rural populations.

33. The Committee expressed broad support for the five core themes that constituted the central elements of the proposed action framework, and some members suggested the possibility of further simplification, including by streamlining the priority areas. While appreciating that education served broad purposes, many members highlighted the critical linkage between education and learning on the one hand and work on the other, urging maximum coordination and synergy between the two workstreams. It also stressed the transformational power of technology and thus the need to build digital skills and literacy. Furthermore, the importance of ensuring operational relevance and impact on the ground was noted, including by linking that approach to the United Nations Development Assistance Framework process at the country level.

34. In conclusion, the Chair confirmed the Committee's strong support for the strategically focused light-touch approach as proposed. He requested UNESCO and UNICEF to continue to co-lead the work and, taking into consideration the feedback and suggestions provided, to prepare a full draft of the strategic approach for the Committee's consideration at its thirty-seventh session.

**Conclusion**

35. **The Committee approved the proposed road map for a United Nations system-wide strategic approach for achieving inclusive, equitable and innovative education and learning for all, and requested UNESCO and UNICEF to co-lead the process to develop, taking into account the comments made, a full-fledged draft for the Committee's consideration at its thirty-seventh session.**

# IV. Contributing system-wide analysis for the upcoming deliberations of the Chief Executives Board

## Drug policy

36. The Chair introduced the item, which was placed on the agenda pursuant to the request of the CEB Chair that the Committee contribute an analytical input to the Board's upcoming deliberations in the second regular session of 2018. Noting that drug problems affected hundreds of millions of people worldwide, the Chair underscored their complex multifaceted nature, which had significant implications across the Sustainable Development Goals and the various pillars of United Nations mandates, requiring broader cross-sector and cross-pillar engagement and coherent system-wide perspectives.

37. In 2009, Member States, in the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem, set 2019 as the target date for States to eliminate or reduce significantly and measurably the supply of and demand for illicit drugs, the diversion of and trafficking in precursors and money-laundering. In 2016, the General Assembly held a special session to review progress and adopted an outcome document (resolution S-30/1, annex). To ensure effective and coherent United Nations support in the comprehensive implementation of those commitments, the Secretary-General placed the issue on the agenda of his Executive Committee in April 2017, tasking UNODC, together with relevant entities, to take concrete steps to improve coordination.

38. In view of the ministerial segment to be convened by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs during its sixty-second session, in March 2019, the CEB Chair decided to include an item on drug policy on the Board's agenda in order to ensure that the United Nations system had a common position. Bearing in mind the efforts already ongoing within the framework of the Executive Committee, the role of High-

level Committee on Programmes was to support the deliberations of CEB by contributing an input for discussion presenting broader inter-agency and systems perspectives. The Committee had before it a draft paper, prepared through a consultative process coordinated by UNODC, providing an overview of the world drug problem and a balanced analysis of key issues surrounding the international policy discourse.

39. In introducing the draft paper, Jean-Luc Lemahieu and Chloe Carpentier (UNODC) underscored the complexity of the issue in the highly politicized and polarized policy environments. The international drug control regime, through its complementary and reinforcing norms, standards and institutions, represented the overarching global consensus and provided the overall framework for international cooperation. The presenters noted that despite divergent views on specific aspects of the framework, Member States remained focused on the implementation of agreed commitments within existing institutions. The paper before the Committee contained an overview of relevant developments in international policy discourse to inform the forthcoming discussion by CEB. It proposed a basis for a common position, building on key messages of the United Nations system prepared in 2017, and put forward a concrete suggestion for system-wide data collection efforts to support and promote the evidence-based implementation of international commitments.

40. In the ensuing discussion, the Committee underscored the importance of a coherent United Nations system position, expressing overall support for building it on the basis of the 2017 joint messages. Members reaffirmed, as an overarching perspective, the United Nations system's commitment to supporting the norms and policies agreed by Member States, including the outcome of the special session, as well as the 2030 Agenda and international human rights standards. The Committee, to that end, underscored the importance of ensuring collaboration and coordination across the system in promoting comprehensive, balanced, integrated, evidence- and rights-based and development-oriented responses to the world drug problem. In view of this convergence of views, the Committee strongly recommended that section IV of the draft be revised to ensure that the paper accurately reflected the United Nations system's shared commitment.

41. While it considered the discussion paper to be educational, by providing highly detailed information on policy issues and ongoing efforts, the Committee strongly advised that a much shorter, more streamlined and less technical paper, providing, nevertheless, sufficient substance at the strategic level, would be more appropriate for the purposes of CEB.

42. Several members underscored that the discussion paper needed to be more strongly anchored in the 2030 Agenda and that health and human rights-related goals and targets should be better highlighted and integrated across the document. Members stressed in particular that issues related to human rights, public health, harm reduction, alternative development and social justice, as well as the link between the world drug problem and political instability in some regions and countries, needed to be articulated better and reflected more clearly. The Committee also underscored the need to ensure more balanced tone and coverage in outlining those issues and varying perspectives.

43. The Chair, while recalling that the Committee's task was to provide CEB with a discussion input rather than with a definitive consensus, noted with appreciation that the Committee had shown overall support for using the proposed United Nations common position as the basis for the Board's consideration. The Committee was of the strong opinion that in order for the draft to be suitable for a principal-level meeting, it needed to be streamlined without losing the necessary substance at the strategic level. The Chair recapitulated the Committee's recommendations that the

paper be more deeply anchored to the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular to ensure better integration of human rights- and health-related targets, and that it recognize the linkages, in some circumstances, between drug-related measures and political instability. The Committee had expressed a clear preference for revising section VI of the draft to more accurately reflect the United Nations system's shared commitment to the agreed global norms and standards and to the pursuit of coherent system-wide support for a truly balanced and comprehensive approach, guided by the agreed framework of policies in drug control, sustainable development, human rights and other relevant areas.

**Conclusion**

44. **The Committee requested UNODC, in consultation with the task group, to finalize the discussion paper, taking duly into account the comments made by the Committee, for onward submission to CEB at its second regular session of 2018.**

# V. Scoping discussion

## Strategic foresight: towards a shared vision for supporting the Sustainable Development Goals in an uncertain future

45. The Chair invited the Committee to engage in a retreat-style exploratory discussion, supported by a facilitator, Arndt Husar, on the concept and application of strategic foresight. Guided by the orientation paper, including discussion questions, its aim was to enhance members' collective understanding of strategic foresight; consider its merits, relevance and feasibility for the Committee's ongoing and future work in system-wide policy coordination and programmatic coherence; and explore a possible role for the Committee in enhancing foresight capacities in the United Nations system.

46. The facilitator provided an overview of how the application of strategic foresight presented an opportunity to move from an exploratory or deductive approach to understanding future potential (i.e., observing historic and current events to anticipate projected or probable futures) to an inductive or anticipatory approach that permitted moving beyond preconceptions of what was possible. The aim was to empower decision makers to navigate towards the preferred future — in the case of the United Nations, the world envisioned in the 2030 Agenda. Given that the path to 2030 was not linear and that development efforts would likely be disrupted along the way, agility and flexibility would be needed to tackle challenges as they arose, and those who incorporated foresight techniques in their working methods would be better prepared and more resilient in the face of uncertainty and disruption. Noting that a range of foresight methodologies were available, the facilitator introduced a number of techniques [1] and applications [2] based on the example of the United Nations Development Programme's "empowered futures" initiative, which is aimed at

[1] Scanning: exploring the external environment to better understand the nature and pace of change and identify opportunities and challenges; visioning: a participatory method for identifying, developing and enriching a compelling, preferred future scenario; backcasting: working backward from the future to understand and explore alternative future paths; wind-tunnelling: stress-testing goals and objectives against different future scenarios. For details see: www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/capacity-building/global-centre-for-public-service-excellence/ForesightManual2018.html.

[2] Visionary foresight: helps to create empowering narratives in a rapidly transforming world; strategic foresight: identifies strategic opportunities in the emerging future to achieve such visions as the Sustainable Development Goals; adaptive foresight: strengthens the resilience of policies and planning; creative foresight: innovates the design and delivery of public services.

providing developing country Governments and other stakeholders with capacities and tools to shape and realize their own futures. In addition, he noted a number of United Nations system activities employing "futures thinking", pointing to a potential rationale for promoting synergies among them and pursuing system-wide engagement on foresight.

47. To illustrate how foresight techniques were already being applied in a United Nations system context, Klaus Tilmes (World Bank Group) shared his experience in integrating foresight into and across the World Bank's practices and capacities to make better sense of emerging technologies and their accompanying disruptions. With the support and sponsorship of the President of the World Bank, he and his small team pursued the task holistically, addressing internal, global and country-level perspectives. They engaged both staff and outside experts in examining the issues and opportunities, identified the Bank's core corporate contributions in the context of the fast-changing environment and established a variety of mechanisms, including a "disruptive technology network", two labs, on artificial intelligence and blockchain, and pilot programmes with private sector partners, to reorient the Bank to enhance its ability to navigate the pathway of disruption. Mr. Tilmes reported that in nine months, the Bank's management and board of directors had affirmed the critical nature of the effort, future awareness had risen among Bank staff and organizational mindsets had begun to shift. He concluded that the United Nations system, with its shared agenda and wealth of entity-specific insights, would benefit from a broad and collaborative use of foresight, which would enable it to speak with one voice and in a shared language.

48. Presenting a second case study, Riel Miller (UNESCO) addressed the broad value of promoting "futures literacy": the capacity to imagine the future and use it in planning and decision-making. The UNESCO Futures Literacy Laboratories had been established to provide a wide range of actors with the capacity to address their most pressing issues by "using the future", or identifying their goals and applying their imagination to realize their aspirations. As with foresight, there were different techniques and methodologies, many of which were easy to learn to apply. In an era of disruption and change, Mr. Miller stressed the timeliness of developing a futures literacy capability within United Nations system organizations to improve support to beneficiaries. Once the ways in which the future could be used are better understood, it will be more possible to create the conditions for change.

49. In the ensuing interactive discussion, members responded positively to the presentations and were enthusiastic about applying the practices within their organizations as well as in the context of the Committee's joint efforts. They appreciated the relevance of strategic foresight for United Nations system efforts, seeing the potential for mainstreaming its use across a wide range of application areas. The Committee strongly affirmed that strategic foresight was well aligned with its mandate and role as a think tank for the system and that it was important to lead by example in approaching its work through the lens of the future. Integrating foresight approaches in its policy and strategy development toolbox would expand the Committee's ability to engage system-wide with possible futures and improve its anticipatory capacity.

50. Members identified a variety of benefits for the Committee (and by extension CEB) of engaging with foresight techniques. Of great relevance in this inter-agency context, such engagement would enhance the ability to interact across silos, practices and organizations, bringing in expertise from unusual quarters and challenging assumptions. Pathways by which to navigate towards the "desired future" in a way that is more agile and flexible could be identified, which would also facilitate the creation of a detailed rendering of the 2030 future. Recognizing the difficulty of fully predicting the future, members expressed the view that the use of foresight techniques

would demonstrate that the Committee had based its recommendations not only on a statistical analysis of historical or concurrent data (which nevertheless remained valuable inputs), but had also leveraged sense-making processes by exploring alternative futures and improving the futures literacy capabilities of the United Nations system. Perhaps most importantly, embracing this practice would demonstrate thought leadership through true system-wide engagement on challenges that are over the horizon.

51. Several potential areas of engagement around those strategic techniques were proposed. Foremost among them, members supported the integration of foresight approaches in the Committee's work with a view to making it more anticipatory. The Committee could commission studies or conduct exercises on key emerging issues to identify policy pathways and facilitate engagement. A pilot project on the application of strategic foresight could demonstrate its relevance for the Committee's core work on policy and programme coordination, as well as its ability to identify emerging issues that could influence the Committee's agenda. One possibility was to apply strategic foresight to the ongoing analysis of the future of work, learning and education, and artificial intelligence, although caution was urged to avoid stalling work that was nearing finalization. Proposals for new thematic options to be examined through a "futures lens" included ageing, climate change, urbanization (possibly with a specific angle on sustainable consumption and production) and green economy/green jobs. The possible merit of collaborating with such other inter-agency bodies as the United Nations Strategic Planning Network was also mentioned.

52. More broadly, the Committee and its members could raise awareness of and advocate for futures thinking, specifically to take a longer-term view of sustainable development beyond 2030 and appeal for bold leadership in pursuit of the "desired future" scenario. It was suggested that some of the United Nations system work on foresight could be presented and its value demonstrated to Member States at the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council. The need to press for more cohesive strategic planning processes at the country level was also mentioned, for example, through United Nations Development Assistance Framework guidance on applying foresight and by making foresight tools and knowledge, including outside expertise, available to country teams and learning from their experiences.

53. Members saw strong demand for a practical initiative to promote inter-agency information-sharing on the fragmented foresight practices, products and capacities currently in use across the United Nations system through some form of knowledge hub. Merit was seen in establishing an experience-sharing network for practitioners that were already active across the system and in gradually building and enhancing internal collaboration and cross-fertilization. A Committee-hosted community of practice on strategic foresight could not only enable members to share experiences, exchange lessons learned and enhance the quality of their respective work, but also serve as a resource pool enabling the wider adoption and deployment of foresight approaches across the system in support of sustainable development. The community of practice could also serve as a collective interface for engaging and collaborating with external experts, including in non-United Nations international organizations or academia. Members expressed the view that the Committee would benefit from hosting a community of practice, as it could provide useful inputs to the Committee's ongoing analytical and strategy development work and, as appropriate, its support to CEB.

54. To broaden capabilities beyond the existing community of practitioners, it was proposed that the Committee promote capacity development among United Nations system entities and help initiate a shared facility to promote the coherent and systematic application of strategic foresight throughout the system by, for example, combining tools and developing joint toolkits. The ILO International Training Centre,

with its existing foresight capacities, and the United Nations System Staff College were mentioned as mechanisms that could potentially be leveraged for that purpose.

55. It was suggested that the Committee sponsor the development of methodologies to overcome blind spots and remove obstacles to seeing opportunities, threats and risks that were due to assumptions and restrictive political orthodoxies. It could also promote the joining up of sources and the synthesis of information on specific contexts to better detect weak signals or flag disruptions that would otherwise not get attention. Furthermore, the Committee could support the joint creation of foresight products for use by United Nations system organizations, Member States and the general public to help guide work towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

56. Throughout the session, members highlighted recent work in their organizations, which had a wide range of maturity and complexity. In the sharing of experiences, a number of success factors were identified, the most prominent of which were senior-level buy-in to back an initiative, provide visibility and engage with the outputs; proper scoping and design and a sound evidence base to inform the foresight process; engagement with multidisciplinary stakeholders to challenge dominant assumptions and add new perspectives during scanning exercises; communications and engagement with wider internal stakeholders (beyond those directly engaged in strategic planning and policy development); creating foresight products that were actionable today; and the mainstreaming of futures literacy in the Organization.

57. In closing the scoping discussion, the Chair noted the strong and enthusiastic support of the Committee for engaging with alternative futures and deploying foresight approaches in its work. Seeing that effort as having the potential to serve as a vector for change in the United Nations system, he stressed the need to widely propagate the use of foresight throughout United Nations organizations, including at the country level. The Chair observed that promoting, coordinating and pursuing concrete and targeted engagement with strategic foresight on a system-wide basis offered a promising opportunity for the Committee to further embody its expected role as a think tank for the system.

58. The Chair concluded that, given the Committee's views, two main streams of action could be pursued to realize considerable potential: first, foresight approaches could be applied to a pilot topic on the Committee's agenda as a way to familiarize members with the key concepts and methodologies and test and demonstrate their concrete relevance to the Committee's work in promoting system-wide policy coordination and programmatic coherence; and second, the Committee could explore ways to promote experience-sharing and capacity-building across the system in an effort to promote and support critical mass and a network of futures-literate organizations and individuals within the United Nations system.

**Conclusion**

59. **The Committee decided to: (a) pursue a pilot foresight exercise on an appropriate challenge and/or topic (to be selected) to explore and assess the practicality of integrating foresight approaches in its work with a view to enhancing its agenda-setting, deliberations and products; and (b) explore options to promote and support foresight capacities across the United Nations system and foster cross-agency and system-wide collaboration on foresight.**

# VI. Progress reviews and other matters

## Progress reviews: Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020; UN-Water; UN-Energy; and UN-Oceans

60. Further to its electronic reviews and endorsements in advance of the session, the Committee took note of the progress report on the ongoing effort to mainstream the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020 into the work programmes of United Nations system organizations, submitted by the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, as well as of the progress reports of UN-Water, UN-Energy and UN-Oceans.

## Other matters

### Dates and location of the thirty-seventh session of the Committee

61. The Chair proposed the dates of 8 and 9 April 2019 for the Committee's thirty-seventh session, to be held at United Nations Headquarters, in New York.

### Conclusion

62. **The Committee approved the dates and location of its thirty-seventh session: 8 and 9 April 2019 at United Nations Headquarters, in New York.**

## Progress update: shared framework for action on equality and non-discrimination

63. The Chair recalled the Committee's process, co-led by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), to develop a shared United Nations system framework for action on equality and non-discrimination, which had been endorsed by the Board in 2016. He noted that the framework mandated the Committee to periodically review progress and impact at the strategic and global policy levels so as to strengthen coordination and coherence and identify gaps, while country-level implementation was being pursued through the United Nations Sustainable Development Group.

64. The progress report on the framework highlighted that, despite significant achievements, more needed to be done, for example with respect to economic inequality, social protection systems and social/environmental or human rights impact assessments. Stressing the imperative to leave no one behind, the Committee supported the recommendation by the co-leaders that equality and non-discrimination be placed on the agenda of a future session of the Committee with a view to facilitating a more robust review to galvanize action to close the gaps identified.

### Conclusion

65. ***The Committee decided to undertake a fuller review of the progress and* gaps in implementing the framework for action on equality and non-discrimination at its thirty-seventh session.**

## Progress update: urbanization and sustainable development

66. The Chair invited the Committee to consider the proposal to revitalize the United Nations system's efforts in support of the New Urban Agenda, building on the policy paper developed by the Committee in 2016 as an input to the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III). Christopher Williams (United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)) provided the background and rationale for the proposal, recalling the recent intergovernmental decisions and the request made by the Senior Management Group. The Committee responded favourably to the proposal to establish a time-bound task team, led by UN-Habitat, to prepare, on the basis of the 2016 paper, a draft system-wide strategy for its consideration at the thirty-seventh session.

### Conclusion

67. **The Committee approved the proposal to develop, building on its earlier analytical work and in alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other relevant global agreements, a system-wide strategy for sustainable urban development and requested UN-Habitat to lead a time-bound consultation process to prepare a draft for the Committee's consideration at the thirty-seventh session.**

Annex I

# Agenda

**Building system-wide knowledge and capacity through "deep-dive" analyses**

1. Impact of frontier technologies on developing countries.

**Promoting system-wide action on frontier challenges in support of the Sustainable Development Goals**

2. Artificial intelligence: capacity development for developing countries.
3. Future of work.
4. Future of learning and education.

**Contributing system-wide analysis for the upcoming deliberations of the Chief Executives Board**

5. Drug policy.

**Scoping discussion**

6. Strategic foresight: towards a shared vision for supporting the Sustainable Development Goals in an uncertain future.

**Progress reviews and other matters**

7. Progress reviews: Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020; UN-Water; UN-Energy; and UN-Oceans.
8. Other matters:
   (a) Dates and location of the thirty-seventh session of the Committee;
   (b) Progress update: shared framework for action on equality and non-discrimination;
   (c) Progress update: urbanization and sustainable development.

# Annex II

## List of participants

**Chair**: Guy Ryder (ILO)

**Secretary**: Kayoko Gotoh

| *Organization* | *Name* |
|---|---|
| United Nations | |
| Department of Economic and Social Affairs | Marion Barthelemy |
| Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs | Hansjoerg Strohmeyer |
| Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights | Craig Mokhiber |
| Regional commissions | Amr Nour |
| Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change | Daniele Violetti |
| Global Pulse | Robert Kirkpatrick |
| International Labour Organization | Andre Bogui |
| | Shengjie Li |
| | Dorothea Schmidt-Klau |
| | Sangheon Lee |
| Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations | Beth Crawford |
| | James Azevedo Görgen |
| | Cristina Petracchi |
| United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization | Marie-Ange Theobald |
| | Clare Stark |
| | Sobhi Tawil |
| | Riel Miller |
| International Civil Aviation Organization | Latifa Hadbi |
| World Health Organization | Shambhu Acharya |
| | Ivana Milovanovic |
| | Ivan Ivanov |
| World Bank Group | Jos Verbeek |
| | Klaus Tilmes |
| Universal Postal Union | Abdellatif Meskine |

| *Organization* | *Name* |
|---|---|
| International Telecommunication Union | Preetam Maloor |
| | Mario Castro Grande |
| International Maritime Organization | Arsenio Dominguez |
| International Fund for Agricultural Development | Cornelia Richter, Vice-President |
| | Charlotte Salford |
| | Ashwani Muthoo |
| | Shantanu Mathur |
| | Torben Nilsson |
| United National Industrial Development Organization | Tsung Ping Chung |
| World Tourism Organization | Zoritsa Urosevic |
| International Atomic Energy Agency | Nuno Luzio |
| International Organization for Migration | Ashraf El Nour |
| United Nations Conference on Trade and Development | Paul Akiwumi |
| | Clovis Freire |
| United Nations Development Programme | Maria Luisa Silva |
| United Nations Environment Programme | Maaike Jansen |
| Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees | Andrew Harper |
| United Nations Children's Fund | Jo Bourne |
| | David Matern |
| | Lidia Tutarinova |
| | Tim Unwin |
| United Nations Population Fund | Ramiz Alakbarov |
| | Alexander Pak |
| World Food Programme | Jean-Pierre de Margerie |
| United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime | Gillian Murray |
| | Jean-Luc Lemahieu |
| | Doris Resch |
| | Chloe Carpentier |
| United Nations Human Settlements Programme | Christopher Williams |
| United Nations University | James Cockayne |

| *Organization* | *Name* |
|---|---|
| Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS | Tim Martineau |
| Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization | Patrick Grenard |
| Secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination | Simona Petrova |
| | Federica Pietracci |
| | Xenia von Lilien |
| | Cheryl Stafford |
| | Marije van den Berg |
| | Arndt Husar (facilitator) |